The Southeastern Librarian

Article 5

Summer 2002

Developing a Mentor Program at the University of South Florida

Carol Ann Borchert
University of South Florida, borchert@usf.edu

Jana Futch Martin
University of South Florida, jana@lib.usf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Borchert, Carol Ann and Martin, Jana Futch (2002) "Developing a Mentor Program at the University of South Florida," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol50/iss2/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Developing a Mentor Program at the University of South Florida

Carol Ann Borchert and Jana Futch Martin

Carol Ann Borchert is Reference/Latin American and Caribbean Studies Librarian at University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library and can be contacted at borchert@lib.usf.edu. Jana Futch Martin is Reference Librarian at University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library.

_____

Mentoring and Why it is Important

Recruiting minorities into the library profession has always been challenging, and now our profession faces the challenge of recruiting new librarians to replace the large numbers of us preparing for retirement. Wilder writes in an article from 2000 that in 1990, the percentage of librarians age 45 or over was 45.8%, 52.8% in 1994 and 56.7% in 1998[1]. The July 2000 *Monthly Labor Review* indicates that of the 209,000 librarians employed in 1998, 56.5% were over the age of 45, with a median age of 47[2]. Of the 500 professions examined, librarians were ranked 7th for having the largest percentage of professionals over the age of 45. The study estimates that 50,000 librarians will need to be replaced in the next 10 years, with 46.4% of workers over the age of 45 leaving the occupation before 2008. This mass exodus from our ranks suggests that recruitment efforts will be vital in helping libraries to fill these vacant positions. To help alleviate this predicament, First Lady Laura Bush spearheaded a $10 million initiative for 2003 to recruit new librarians[3]. This is a fantastic beginning but ongoing efforts will be necessary.

There are a number of ways that each of us can contribute to this recruitment effort, and mentoring is just one of them. By mentoring a new librarian or library school student we help them to understand what will be expected of them as contributing members of the profession. There are various types of mentoring. Students who are already familiar with a library school program may mentor new students to help orient them to their academic studies and encourage them to become involved in student or professional organizations. Faculty members in a library school may also mentor students, as could librarians from an adjoining academic library or nearby public or special library. This gives students first-hand knowledge of what librarians do on a daily basis. New librarians in an organization also need to be mentored. Library schools are becoming more adept at preparing students for their roles as librarians, but new librarians still need some level of guidance. New librarians in smaller libraries and librarians in specialized areas such as government documents often find that they have no one in their building who can "show them the ropes." These librarians must be resourceful in seeking assistance from colleagues beyond the walls of their workplaces. Active membership in local, state, and national organizations can help. Even experienced librarians will need some degree of mentoring to learn about the new organizational culture they have joined. How does a librarian become active on state and national committees? How does a librarian get published? Are these activities valued in this particular library and will they be supported by library administration?

History of the Program

The Mentor Committee began as an idea from the University of South Florida (USF) Tampa Campus Library Diversity Committee and was incorporated into the Diversity Plan 2000, written in 1996[4]. John Davies, chair of the library's Diversity Committee in 1998, recruited committee members Carol Ann Borchert, Jana Futch (now Jana Martin), and Cecilia Poon. The committee conducted a literature search and selected articles for committee members to read to learn more about mentoring and how to create a successful program. (A selected bibliography of material is included in **Appendix.**) The program is modeled on the University of California/Los Angeles Graduate School of

Library and Information Science mentor program. The USF Mentor Program brochure for mentees, the mentor and mentee surveys, and the Mentor-Mentee Reception for program participants (all available at http://www.lib.usf.edu/diversity/mentor.html) were developed based upon the description of the UCLA program in an article by Kaplowitz[5]. Originally, the USF Mentor Program was intended to recruit minorities into the profession, but the committee decided that this would exclude a large segment of the student population.

The committee met with the USF School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) faculty, whereupon Sonia Wohlmuth from the SLIS volunteered to be the committee's faculty contact in the library school. John Davies created a project timeline for the Mentor Program, and the committee planned a brochure for mentees. Under the original guidelines students had to be currently enrolled in the program in their second semester of study so that they would know more about libraries and the profession. In turn, the completed mentee forms would more accurately reflect true areas of interest and facilitate assignment of a compatible mentor. However, there are many non-degree-seeking students taking classes and still deciding if librarianship will be their chosen career path. The Committee felt that these students might also benefit from a mentor/mentee relationship. The opportunity to interact and network with a librarian and learn about their daily professional life can make or break a student's decision to enroll in an MLS program.

Currently, students entering the Mentor Program are expected to have completed at least one core course and/or to have a clear-cut vision of what type of library work they would like to do. The mentor/mentee match is designed to survive for the remainder of the student's coursework, generally three to four semesters, although some might choose to maintain contact after that time.

The mentee brochure information was mounted on the USF SLIS Web page (see http://www.cas.usf.edu/lis/gen/mentorbrochure.html) and linked from the Diversity Committee's Web page. At the end of 1999, Mentor

Committee members introduced the Mentor Program at a library faculty and department heads' meetings. The support of the library director and senior management was vital in this effort! The director encouraged supervisors to allow librarians time for mentoring activities and funded the Mentor-Mentee receptions.

To supplement the mentee information on the SLIS Web page, an Information for Mentors handout was created and mounted on the Diversity Committee's Web page at http://www.lib.usf.edu/diversity/mentorreq.html. Members of the committee attended core SLIS classes to publicize the program and distribute the brochures. The committee matched students with librarians from the USF Tampa Campus Library. In February 2000 the committee held a reception for all mentors and mentees in the program. This gave new mentors and mentees the opportunity to set a first meeting time face-to-face. In a survey conducted later, both mentors and mentees found the reception to be helpful.

In the spring of 2001 the Mentor Committee administered a survey to acquire feedback from the first group of mentors and mentees. Of the nine surveys sent to mentors, four were returned. Two of them indicated that they had been in contact with their mentees 3-4 times a semester (which is the program goal), with one only having 1-2 contacts, and one having more than four contacts. Each felt they were matched with a compatible mentee, and all had engaged in informal chats and resume or job search discussions as mentoring activities. One had also taken her mentee to lunch. All mentors felt their mentees benefited from the program and were willing to serve as a mentor again. At that time all mentors were academic librarians and most were working as reference librarians, and one a cataloging librarian. Some librarians mentored more than one student.

Of the 11 surveys sent to mentees, only 3 were returned. All respondents felt they were matched with a compatible mentor and had discussed resume or job search information with their mentor or just had informal chats. Most feedback from both mentors and mentees was favorable, but a few problems appeared which could have been prevented with more frequent requests for feedback. In some instances,

although their interests may have been compatible, a mentor and mentee did not "click" for reasons such as communication problems. Although they did not respond to the survey, one or two mentors were never able to establish contact with their mentees. One student suggested publicizing the program more.

During the first year the committee realized that students needed to rank their interests on the brochure. If a student selected several options of types of work or libraries committee members had no idea which area was the most important. They also decided to publicize the program every semester in the core classes and on the library school's ALIS listserv, and to organize their records better. Replacing committee members as they left was also important but, because the Mentor Program Committee is a subcommittee of the library's Diversity Committee, there was no mechanism to do this. The committee planned to expand the program to find mentors outside of the USF library system. The USF SLIS American Library Association (ALA) student chapter president would be a natural match, since he has contact with the student body and can help publicize the program. The committee also realized they needed to establish a mechanism for more frequent feedback as problems arose, at which point they decided to email mentors and mentees once a semester to see how things were going.

The past year: SUCCESS!

In April 2001, Carol Ann Borchert and Jana Futch presented a program at the Florida Library Association Annual Conference, "Developing a Mentor Program." From this presentation, the committee grew to five members, including another member from the Diversity Committee (Charles Gordon), the president of the student ALA chapter at USF (Scott McGaha), and a public librarian from Palm Harbor (Gene Coppola). Originally, the program had only recruited mentors from the USF Tampa Campus Library, with the intent to later recruit mentors from libraries of all types in the Tampa Bay area. With additional members, the committee began to publicize the program vigorously in

2001. They sent out a press release requesting mentors from the Tampa Bay area, visited the core SLIS courses in the fall, and emailed messages to the student listserv and to the professors teaching distance education courses for the library science program. The program grew from 7 mentee/mentor pairs to twenty-two in one semester. Carol Ann Borchert also restructured the committee's records to make mentor and mentee information easier to maintain and contacted all mentees and mentors in the program to request informal feedback. The committee is now conducting the formal survey each spring, with additional requests for feedback in the summer and fall.

Challenges and Difficulties

The program has encountered a number of challenges over the past two years. Mentors are often willing to help but are sometimes overwhelmed with general job responsibilities. It is not always clear who is supposed to initiate contact—the mentor or the mentee. Both parties become frustrated when communication fizzles. Mentor Committee members try to emphasize to students that the program is for their benefit, not the mentor's, and that they must show initiative by contacting their mentor if they do not hear from them for a while. If the mentor is unresponsive, they can contact a member of the committee and request intervention or a new mentor. Contact information for all committee members is currently listed on the Mentor Program Web site[6]. Occasionally mentors have tried to establish contact with mentees, but the mentees have been too busy with coursework and other obligations. In that case, committee members have reminded mentors that the program is for the mentees, and that a good-faith effort is all they can do.

The USF Library School has a large distance education population, which has been problematic for the Mentor Program. The SLIS offers all but one of their graduate courses online or at a remote campus location. This means that some of the students hoping to be mentees do not ever come to Tampa, where most of the mentors are located. The committee makes every attempt to match a mentee with

someone compatible in a geographic area near them, and has been successful in finding mentors as far away as Sarasota, and in one case, Miami. The committee refers students from the Miami area to The Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN), which has a mentoring program. In some cases, members of the committee do not have the network to match a student by area of work interest, type of library, *and* location, so they try to choose the most important two of the three for the student.

Students also need periodic contact from the committee. If there is a problem between a mentee and mentor pairing, the mentee does not always notify anyone or even know who to contact. By requesting feedback at least once a semester, the committee can correct such situations by either acting as a liaison between the mentor and mentee or finding a new mentor.

Where We Are Now

In February 2002, the USF Mentor Program held a second reception to allow mentees and mentors to become acquainted with other people in the program. In March the committee conducted its second annual survey, redesigning it with a Likert scale, versus the straight "yes/no" answers used in the 2000 survey. (For a full copy of both the mentor and mentee survey go to http://www.lib.usf.edu/diversity/mentor.html) . Again, responses were largely positive with some helpful suggestions. This year, the committee sent surveys to 20 librarian mentors and 20 mentees (see **Table 1**). Thirteen mentors and eight mentees returned the survey. Eight of the responding mentors worked in academic libraries, with others being from public (2), school (2) and one corporate librarian. Mentors represented numerous types of library work, with six of them working in reference and five in administration or management. Other aspects of librarianship represented in the mentor pool included media specialists, systems, cataloging, collection development, government documents, media, serials, special collections, and Web design. Ten of the respondents were relatively new to the program, with less than one year's involvement, and nine had experience with only one mentee. Seven of them had been in contact

with their mentee more than four times during the semester, with an average of 6-8 times. This exceeds the program goal of 2-4 mentor-mentee contacts per semester.

Most of the mentors felt they had been matched with mentees who had similar interests; with only two saying that they shared "similar and dissimilar interests." None of them felt that they had mainly dissimilar interests from their mentees. Six of the eight mentee respondents stated that they had similar interests and two had "similar and dissimilar interests" from their mentors.

Most of the mentors and mentees reported that their main activities were informal chats or discussing resumes or job searches. This year, some also included "attending a meeting with them" as one of their activities. However, it was not clear if this referred to going to the mentor's office for a face-to-face meeting or attending a professional meeting as an observer. Other activities listed included having a meal together, communicating by email, giving the mentee a departmental tour, discussing the librarian's projects, and discussing library school courses and coursework. Of the eight mentors who attended the February mentee-mentor reception, half were neutral on whether the reception was beneficial. Three found it to be beneficial and one did not find it to be very beneficial. Because this was not a kick-off reception like the first one, many of the mentees and mentors had already met, which perhaps made the reception a bit anti-climactic.

When asked if they thought their mentees had benefited from the program, two of the mentors felt that their mentees had benefited a great deal; five felt they had benefited somewhat; two felt the mentee had experienced benefits and drawbacks; and one thought the mentee had not benefited at all. Two mentors felt it was too early to determine if the mentee had received any benefit; and one did not complete the rest of the survey. Nine of the respondents are very willing to mentor again; two are somewhat willing; and one would have to think about it. One of the mentors suggested some sort of report card for the mentor from the mentee to obtain feedback on how they are doing as a mentor. Another suggested that

students be reminded that having a mentor working outside the student's area of interest can still be beneficial. Many respondents commented that the program is an excellent idea and were very supportive of it.

Of the eight mentees responding to the survey there was an even split between those interested in academic and public libraries, with one student also being interested in archives. Half of them were interested in reference and two in special collections. Other areas of interest included administration, children or youth services, government documents, instruction, and serials. Six felt they had similar interests in common with their mentor, and two said they shared "similar and dissimilar interests." Half had been in contact with their mentors four or more times in the course of a semester, but did not specify how many times. Three had been in contact with their mentor 3-4 times a semester, and one had been in contact 1-2 times a semester. In addition to the activities listed by the mentors, one mentee had spent the day in the field with her mentor observing classes and talking in between.

Of the eight mentee respondents, five of them attended the Mentor-Mentee Reception in February, and four found it to be beneficial, with one not having an opinion. A larger percentage of the mentees than mentors found the reception to be helpful, which was not surprising. Librarians have numerous opportunities for such networking, and would attend for the chance to spend time with their mentee. The mentees, on the other hand, could meet additional librarians and other SLIS students who were in the Mentor Program.

Six mentees felt they had benefited a great deal from the Mentor Program, and two said they had experienced both benefits and drawbacks. One student also suggested establishing guidelines for the relationship, such as confidentiality, which the committee had overlooked in its initial guidelines for mentors. The mentees were very enthusiastic overall about the program. Seven said they would definitely recommend the program, and one said she might recommend the program.

Feedback from the surveys and informal email contacts have shown that mentors can be quite effective in helping a mentee and not even realize it. Even a brief informal chat and a few words of encouragement can go a long way for most mentees. The idea that they have a resource person in the profession who knows them and cares about their progress is often helpful in itself. Without a lot of effort the mentor can answer questions about the profession and share experiences, career paths, current projects and goals. Mentors can also provide invaluable advice on how to structure resumes, what to expect in a job search and interview, and how to position oneself for that ideal library job. The experience adds one more dimension to what the student gains from the academic library science program and helps prepare him/her to be an active member of the library profession.

To avoid pitfalls boundaries should be set at the beginning of the relationship, and methods of communication clarified. The mentee must decide what they want from the mentor and communicate that information. Given a responsive mentor, the mentee will get as much out of the program as they put into it.

References

[1] Wilder, Stanley. *"The Changing Profile of Research Library Professional Staff." ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC. 208/209 (2000). Accessed 2 April 2002.* Available http://www.arl.org/newsltr/208_209/chgprofile.html.

[2] Dohm, Arlene. "Gauging the Labor Force Effects of Retiring Baby-Boomers." Monthly Labor Review. 123,7 (July 2000): 17-25.

[3] "Laura Bush Addresses Nation's Critical Shortage of Librarians: $10 Million to Recruit New Librarians." FLA News Digest. Jan. 2002. Accessed 2 April 2002. Available http://www.flalib.org/library/fla/libnews/ndjan2002.htm.

[4] For a full copy of the Diversity Plan 2000, please go to http://www.lib.usf.edu/diversity/dstratplan.html

[5] For the full article, see Kaplowitz, Joan. "Mentoring Library School Students—A Survey of Participants in the UCLA/GSLIS Mentor Program." Special Libraries. 83 (Fall 1992): 219-233.

[6] The Mentor Program Web site is at http://www.lib.usf.edu/diversity/mentor.html.

Table 1
Results of 2002 Mentor and Mentee Surveys

	Mentor Responses (n=13)	Mentee Responses (n=8)
Shared similar interests	85%	75%
Had contact more than 4 times in a semester	54%	50%
Had contact 3-4 times in a semester	23%	38%
Had contact 1-2 times in a semester	23%	12%
Had informal chats	77%	100%
Discussed job search or resume	54%	63%
Attended a meeting	15%	38%
Had a meal	15%	0%
Other activities	23%	25%
Attended reception	62%	63%
Found reception beneficial	38%	80%
Felt mentee benefited from program	54%	75%
Would be a mentor again	92%	N/A
Would definitely recommend program	N/A	88%

<h1 style="text-align:center;">Appendix</h1>

<h2 style="text-align:center;">Selective Bibliography on Mentoring in U.S. Libraries</h2>

Burruss-Ballard, Marsha A. "Mentoring for Leadership." In *Developing Leadership Skills: A Source Book for Librarians.* Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1990.

Abullahi, Ismail. "Mentoring African and African American Library Students." In *Culture Keepers III: Making Global Connections*, edited by Teresa Y. Neely. Westwood, MA: Faxon, 2000.

_____. "Recruitment and Mentoring of Minority Students." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 33 (1992): 307-310.

Abif, Khafre K. "A Commitment to Mentoring." *American Libraries* 30, no.3 (1999): 60.

Adams, Helen R. "Telementoring: Providing Authentic Learning Opportunities for Students." *Book Reports* 17, no.4 (1999): 27-29.

Brinkman, Carol S. and Darla Bressler. "Mentoring--A Bibliography." *Kentucky Libraries* 64, no.4 (2000): 20-22.

Buddy, Juanita Warren and Merchuria Chase Williams. "Mentoring: A Strategy for Success of New Library Media Specialists." *Book Report* 20, no.1 (May/June 2001): 18-20.

Bullington, Jeffrey S. and Susanna D. Boylston. "Strengthening the Profession, Assuring Our Future: ACRL's New Member Mentoring Program Pairs Library Leaders With New Professionals." *College & Research Libraries News* 62, no.4 (Apr. 2001): 430-432.

Cargill, Jennifer S. "Developing Library Leaders: the Role of Mentorship." *Library Administration & Management* 3 (1989): 12-15.

Chamberlain, Clinton. "Mentoring of Graduate Students at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill."   Ph.D diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001.

Culpepper, Jetta Carol. "Mentoring Academic Librarians: the Ultimate in Career Guidance." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 7, no.2 (2000): 71-81.

DeShane, Abby and Michael Mahaley. "Mentoring: An Annotated Bibliography." *Business and Finance Division Bulletin* 113 (2000): 23-29.

Farmer, Jane C. and Fiona Campbell. "Identifying the Transferable Skills of Information Professionals Through Mentoring." *Education for Information* 16, no.2 (1998): 95-106.

Goldberg, Beverly. "The Making of a Mentor." *American Libraries* 28 (1997): 68.

Golian, Linda Marie and Michael W. Galbraith. "Effective Mentoring Programs for Professional Library Development." *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 14 (1996): 95-124.

Hale, Charles E. "A Mentoring Network for Librarians: a Statewide Collaborative Model." *Illinois Libraries* 74 (1992): 485-487.

Hardesty, Larry L. "College Library Mentor Program." *College and Research Libraries News* 54, no.1 (1994): 7.

Jesudason, Melba. "Mentoring New Colleagues: A Practical Model From the University of Wisconsin-Madison." *Illinois Libraries* 79 (1997):23-30.

Kaplowitz, Joan. "Mentoring Library School Students--A Survey of Participants in the UCLA/GSLIS Mentor Program." *Special Libraries* 83 (1992): 219-233.

_____. "Key Behavior for Mentors." *The Unabashed Librarian* 95 (1995): 25.

Kuyper-Rushing, Lois. "A Formal Mentoring Program in a University Library: Components of a Successful Experiment at Louisiana State University." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 27, no.6 (November 2001): 440-446.

Lary, Marilyn Searson. "Mentoring: A Gift for Professional Growth." *The Southwestern Librarian* 47, no.4 (1998): 23-26.

Munde, Gail. "Beyond Mentoring: Toward the Rejuvenation of Academic Libraries." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 26, no.3 (2000): 171-175.

Nankivell, Clare. "Essentials of a Good Relationship." *Library Association Record* 99, no.10 (1997): 545.

Nankivell, Clare and Michael Shoolbred. "Mentoring in Library and Information Services: A Literature Review and Report on Recent Research." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 3 (1997): 91-144.

Parris, Carol J. "A Library Mentoring Program for the Millennium." *Kentucky Libraries* 64, no.2 (2000): 11-14.

_____. "Recruitment and Mentoring Programs for African-Americans Developed in California." *College & Research Libraries News* 10 (1991): 650.

_____. "Recruitment Through Mentoring." *Library Personnel News* 5 (1991): 4.
Reyes, Awilda. "Mentoring to Develop Potential." In *Staff Development: A Practical Guide*, edited by Elizabeth Fuseler Avery. Chicago: American Library Association, 2001.

Rice-Lively, Mary Lynn. "A Model for an Academic Library and Library School Mentor/Protege Program." *College & Research Libraries News* 3 (1991): 163-164.

Roberts, Deanna L. "Mentoring in the Academic Library." *College & Research Libraries News* 2 (1986): 117-119.

Sanborn, LaVonne Hayes. "The Library Media Specialist as Curriculum Cheerleader and Literature Mentor--A "How We Did It" Story." *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 7 (1991): 27-28.

Snow, Marina. "Librarian as Mentor." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16 (1990): 163-164.

Stalcup, Sue S. "Mentoring: A Tool for Career Enhancement." *Library Personnel News* 3 (1989): 4-5.

Taylor, Valerie S. "Mentoring: A Key Resource to Develop Professional and Personal Competencies."
Information Outlook 3, no.2 (1999): 12.

Wang, Hongjie. "Academic Mentorship: An Effective Professional Development Strategy for Medical
Reference Librarians." *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 20, no.2 (Summer 2001):
23-31.

Wittkopf, Barbara J. *Mentoring Programs in ARL Libraries.* Washington, DC: Association of Research
Libraries, Office of Leadership and Management Services, 1999.

_____. "Mentoring in Academic Libraries: LSU Libraries Model." *LLA Bulletin* 61, no.4 (1999):
226-232.

Wojewodzki, Catherine, Linda Lawrence Stein, and Tommy Richardson. "Formalizing an Informal
Process: Developing a Mentoring Program in a University Library." *Technical Services Quarterly* 15,
no.3 (1998): 1-19.